

Singing when waiting on God

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Date: 16 June 2024

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- [0 : 00] We're reading Psalm 40. And the wonderful thing, the wonderful privilege about preaching is that you get a text which you live with all week in preparation.
- And this psalm has been coming out of my pause this week. It's just beautiful. And you probably need about three hours on it.
- So it's going to be badly preached probably because I'll try to say it too much in too short a time. So I'll therefore do my best and I might just cut off without getting to the end.
- That's just a warning to those on slides. We'll just see how the Lord leads. Because the first three, four verses are just fantastic. And there's enough to stop there.
- This is the series called The Soul Song because when God calls us to himself, as the psalmist puts it, he puts a song into our hearts.
- [1 : 03] And he makes us singers. Now, you might be like me, not a particularly good singer. But I love to sing nonetheless. And I love the fact that God has put a song in my heart.
- And this is called Singing When Waiting on God. Hands up those who love to wait. Hands up those who just get really excited when they see a really big queue.
- And they know they have to stand on it. Stand in it. Yeah, there's one person. Well done. There is one person. Well done, Maria. I hate waiting. Yeah, I hate waiting in big queues.
- Hate it. The invention of the internet and online shopping. I'm sure that was actually done for me. Somebody out there said, that's for John Winter. So he can make, it makes life so much easier.
- But you might be like me. Don't like waiting. But God keeps us waiting. And he has good reasons for doing so, as we shall see. So let's read the scriptures together.
- [2 : 06] They're coming on the screen. I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire.
- He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.
- Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you plan for us.
- No one can recount to you. Were I to speak and tell of them, there would be too many to declare. Sacrifice and offering you did not desire. But my ears you have pierced.
- Burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, here I am. I have come. It is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God.
- [3 : 11] Your law is within my heart. I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly. I do not seal my lips, as you know, O Lord.
- I do not hide your righteousness in my heart. I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly. Do not withhold your mercy from me, O Lord.

May your love and your truth always protect me. For troubles without number surround me. My sins have overtaken me and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head and my heart fails within me.

Be pleased, O Lord, to save me. O Lord, come quickly to help me. May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion. May all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace.

May those who say to me, aha, aha, be appalled at their own shame. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you.

[4 : 14] May those who love your salvation always say, the Lord be exalted. Let's say that together. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. May those who love your salvation always say, the Lord be exalted.

That means magnify, be made great by our words, by our actions. Yet I am poor and needy. May the Lord think of me.

You are my help and my deliverer, O my God. Do not delay. Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his holy word. We had fun the other day because I called Eve.

Sophie happens a lot. And then she happened to ask me what I'd been doing that day. And I said, I've been preparing my sermon. And she said, what are you preaching on? I said, Psalm 40.

And I began to recount from memory the first three or four verses. She says, how come you can remember a psalm and you don't even know my name? That's how to cut your father off at the knees.

[5 : 25] Okay, it's tough to wait on God. It's tough to wait on God. David says, I waited patiently for the Lord. And if you've got the Message Bible, it's a terrific translation of the Bible by Eugene Peterson.

He translates it more literally to the Hebrew, I waited and waited and waited for God. I waited and waited and waited for God.

God likes long cues I've experienced. He keeps us waiting. But at last, he looked.

Finally, he listened. And what a relief. At last. The thing I've been longing for, the thing I've been seeking God for, the thing I've been breaking my heart over, at last, he gave me what I was looking for.

Waiting, of course, as we've already indicated, is not easy. The Greek word for waited means to abide under something.

[6 : 31] To bear a burden, if you like. To carry something that is heavy upon your shoulders and upon your heart. But to bear with it.

It's the same word used in 1 Corinthians 13, 7. Love bears all things. To bear all things is to be patient in love.

And if you have been or are or will be in love with somebody, you do have to learn patience because you do discover that even those who you most love can be a little bit annoying sometimes.

So I'm told. So I'm told. But if you bear something, you're not indifferently waiting for it, are you? If you bear the burden of carrying something on your heart that you long for some solution to, you're not indifferent to that.

You're carrying it. It's a heavy load. It's on your mind and heart every day. You bring it to God. You're not hopelessly waiting with resignation either.

[7 : 38] Because the fact that you're bearing this burden and carrying it before the Lord shows him just how much you want it. It's always there. It's always in your mind.

Always troubling you. Always, whenever you pray, it's always coming out. So when you carry that burden, you're not hopelessly waiting for something.

You're actually expectantly waiting for something. I waited and waited and waited for God. At last he looked. Finally he listened.

The Bible doesn't pretend that patience can be learned easily. 1 Peter 2.20 says, Bearing something can hurt.

It can be difficult, uncomfortable, even painful. You have heard of the patience of Job, says James. But we read the story of Job kind of like, you know, but such a distance that we don't get what the patience of Job felt like to Job.

[8 : 53] What it was like when he woke up that tragic morning to discover himself covered in painful boils. So painful that they burst on his skin and left scars.

Waiting for God is hard. But then he gets the news that his wealth has been carried away by some marauding tribesmen and his children have been killed.

How terrible. To be a patient Job. Waiting on God. And waiting and waiting and waiting.

Waiting. Even when his friends came round to try and cheer him up. Miserable comfort, as he called them. I'm still waiting and waiting and waiting on God.

And even if he slay me, yet will I hope in him. So what is the purpose of waiting? Next slide. What can patience, endurance do for our faith?

[9 : 52] Well, it strengthens our faith. Hebrews 10.36-38. You need to persevere so that when you've done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.

But my righteous one will live by faith. It strengthens our faith. It also helps us grow deeper in our relationship with God. 2 Peter 1.4-6.

Through these, he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness and to goodness knowledge and to knowledge self-control and to self-control perseverance or patience.

And to perseverance godliness. If you want to participate in the divine nature, if you want to become more like God, you need to learn patience.

[10 : 57] And we learn patience from Jesus. 2 Thessalonians 3.5. May the Lord direct your heart into God's love and Christ's perseverance. You think of Christ's patience with his disciples, with his family, with the unbelieving crowd, with the Romans who tortured him, with the Jewish leaders who betrayed him and denied him.

Christ patiently endured all of this and in his patience went to the cross and suffered for our sake. We learn patience by modeling our lives upon the patience, the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray for patience. But actually, praying for patience, you know, is not just like, Oh, God, make me patient. Because the reason I'm so impatient is because you made me this way.

It's one of those prayers you pray for, for the grace to do something that you cannot do by yourself. But then it is something you go out and practice. God will not make you patient.

But he will ask you to trust him. So that you may grow in the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And one of those is patience. Colossians 1, 9-14.

[12 : 26] For this reason, since there we heard about you, we've not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God and being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, that you may have great notice, endurance or patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul prays that they will grow in endurance and patience. And you will be rewarded for it. James 1, verse 4, Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

And when you think about patience and the growth and development of it in your life, it does make you a better person to learn patience, patience to know that you can't just demand everything and then have it there and then.

That's the action of a little child, too excited to wait. Patience produces maturity. So it's hard, it's tough to wait on God, but the second point here is that it's worth waiting on God.

[14 : 04] Psalm 40, verses 1 to 5. Let me read it to you. It's on the screen from the message. These slides always look bigger when they're on my computer, but sorry about it.

It's too small. I waited and waited and waited for God. At last he looked, finally he listened. He lifted me out of the ditch, pulled me from the deep mud.

He stood me up on a solid rock to make sure I wouldn't slip. He taught me how to sing the latest God song, a praise song to our God. More and more people are seeing this.

They enter the mystery, abandon themselves to God. Blessed are you who give yourselves over to God. Turn your backs on this world's sure thing. Ignore what the world worships.

The world's a huge stockpile of God wonders and God thoughts. Nothing and no one compares to you. That's what God puts into our hearts.

[15 : 04] We learn the God song. Nothing and no one compares to you. A little bit later, you're going to be transported back to my late teens, early 20s to show what that's like when God puts a God song into your heart, but you have to wait for that.

Little treat. This is a wonderful metaphor, and it is a metaphor. It's unlikely that David was actually kind of stuck in a miry pit. At least if he was, we don't know anything about it.

Jeremiah was. He was lowered down a well because he wouldn't shut up singing the Lord's song, preaching his prophecy to Israel, and they didn't like it, so they tried to shut out God's voice, so they lowered him down a well, but the well was dry, fortunately, so he didn't die, but it was muddy at the bottom, and he got stuck in it.

He couldn't get himself out. And then a Cushite named Ebed-Melech went to the king and asked for Jeremiah to be granted release, and so 30 men, that's how much he was stuck, 30 men were needed to pull him out of the system, literally in the miry clay.

David was probably not in a literal clay pit, but he'd got himself into it many times because David, he's so real.

[16 : 26] He's so kind of like me. He kind of can say really good things and write great songs. I can't write great songs, but he could do that. He was a powerful king.

He was a very wealthy and powerful man. He was desired and admirable just by so many, and yet he could mess up big time. Remember Uriah and Bathsheba and his tragic fall into lustful sin.

He wasn't a great father. We'll mention this on Father's Day. He indulged his children too much. One of his sons raped his sister, and David did nothing about it.

And that sowed seeds of discontent in his other son Absalom's heart and mind. And later in life, Absalom turned against his father and rebelled against him at the start of the civil war.

And then Absalom got caught up, remember, in that tree. And David wanted to spare him. But Joab said, people have died for you. It's not on. And he stuck his javelin into him and so did many, many others.

[17 : 41] And Absalom wept. Oh, Absalom, my son, Absalom. Would God I had died for you. Oh, Absalom, my son, my son. And Joab said, what are you doing? There are widows mourning husbands.

There are parents mourning sons. And you are mourning a rebel. You can't do this, David. He wasn't a great father.

But this man was a man after God's own heart. It's not that he didn't mess up. It's just that every time he messed up, he turned back to God. He opened his heart in repentance.

He didn't pretend that he was something special. He didn't pretend that he was all holy and godly. He just longed for God. When I'm in a pit, when I mess up, when I get it wrong, remember me.

I am poor and needy. I'm a sinner. And my heart is for you. For when I'm at rock bottom, I have no one else to turn to but you.

[18 : 44] That's the heart of a godly man or woman, you know. Not that you're perfect, but that you know where to go when you mess up. And you're not ashamed to own the title sinner.

You're not ashamed. It's not all that's true of you. But it is true of you. You know where to go. When you're in a miry pit, when you fall into some pit of despondency or despair, whatever it might be, you know where to turn.

Next slide, please. So what is your slimy pit? You might be in one today. It might be a pit of sin, like the one I described of David.

When he so badly messed up with Bathsheba, and then it was discovered, his child, the child of their relationship, was taken.

He prayed for that child, that the child may live. But no, it wasn't going to happen. And David wept and mourned throughout the period of his waiting on God as he prayed.

[19 : 52] But when God said no, he washed his face, and people couldn't understand. Why are you looking so relaxed after your child has died? And he said, well, he said, I will not, he will not return to me, but I will go to him.

You see, he knew that God would take care of his child. And that one day, when he was in the house of the Lord forever, he would see his child again. But he understood too, that he justly was being punished for his sin.

Not the child, but David and Bathsheba were justly punished for their sin. Can you imagine the despair he was in?

Such a horrible pit. Oh, there's no way out of this pit. So badly messed up. Surely God will not forgive me again.

I brought public shame upon my office. I am the talk of the taverns. My men will disrespect me. I murdered, or had murdered, a loyal general in my army.

[21 : 00] But he discovered God was merciful and gracious. And when he cried to God in the pit of sin, God forgave him and lifted him out.

There is never a sin too great that you can't be forgiven of, you know. The only sin that is unforgivable is the sin against the Holy Spirit, the sin of refusing to hear the voice of God, the sin of refusing to repent and believe the gospel.

If you refuse God's offer of salvation, there can be no forgiveness, but any other sin can be forgiven. Any sin, no matter how bad.

For where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. So it might be the pit of sin. It might be the pit of regret, anxiety, or fear. David knew what that was like.

And one of my favorite verses in the psalm, of which I have about 7,000, is Psalm 61 in verse 2. When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

[22 : 08] That was my screensaver for a long time. When my heart is overwhelmed, and it often is, lead me to a rock that is higher than, bigger than me, so I can stand on something and not drown.

Sometimes we can get so overwhelmed with regret. Oh, if only I hadn't done this. If only I hadn't said that. If only I hadn't been there. If only I'd taken a different course.

If only, if only, if only. You can live under the weight of that regret for the rest of your life until you die miserably. Or you can leave it in the past with God and move on with your life.

For that does not define you. That is not your identity. Your identity is in Christ. You have become a Christian because the Son of God loved you and gave himself for you.

You have begun again. You are a new creation. You don't have to let regrets, fears, and anxieties overwhelm you. You can live in the joy of the Lord, which is your strength.

[23 : 10] I'm here to say to you today that if you are in the pit of regret, anxiety, and fear, if that controls your life every day on a daily basis, from today, it can be different.

when my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. It might be a pit of despair because some people get to that point so desperate, so depressed, so overwhelmed that there's no way out.

I'm going to show you a picture. I'm going to kind of stop at this point because you need to hear the song. But the picture of John Bunyan. If you never read Pilgrim's Progress, you really need to read Pilgrim's Progress.

It's a fantastic book. It's got so many stories in. This is about Bunyan, about Christian as he's called. Christian was walking from the city of destruction and he was going to the prince's palace, the king's palace.

And he had a big burden on his back. Couldn't get rid of it. And it weighed him down so you can see him kind of walking like this, you know. And he wanted to be rid of it.

[24 : 38] And there were various people out of his town who joined him. One of them was Pliable. It's a great name. Pliable. Easily manipulated. Easily moved.

So Pliable's walking with Christian and they fall into a slough of despond. Wouldn't you like to fall into a slough of despond? I think that's fantastic. Like a quicksand.

And he's up to his waist. Well, it's worse for poor Christian because he's got this burden on his back and he fears that he's sinking. And Pliable says, you never told me it was going to be hard. You said it was going to be easy.

This going to the king's city. And so Pliable, struggles and struggles, gets out of the slough of despond and goes back to the city of destruction. I've had enough of this, he says.

Goes back there, mocks Christian for his journey. Christian's stuck there. And along comes a man called Help with a capital H. The Helper, the Holy Spirit, says, what are you doing in there?

[25 : 37] Because he was wallowing for some time, grievously bedoubled with dirt. You can't say it as better than that, can you? Christian says, well, I was bitten to go here by evangelist who directed me to yonder gate that I might escape the wrath that is to come.

And I was going nither and I fell in here. Help said, but why did you not look for the steps? Christian says, fear followed me so hard that I fled the next way and fell in. Help said, then give me your hand.

So he gave him his hand and he drew him out and set him upon some ground and bade him go on his way. He brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay and set my feet upon a rock and established my goings.

And then he goes to the cross. And when he goes to the cross, his burden falls off. It falls into a sepulcher, a grave, an open grave. It's never seen again. And then he sings a song.

Thus far did I come laden with my sin, nor could aught ease the grief that I was in. Till I came hither, what a place is this? Must here be the beginning of my bliss.

[26 : 53] Must here the burden fall from off my back. Must here the strings that bounded to me crack. Best cross, best sepulcher, best rather be the man that there was put to shame for me.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. I love it. Father's Day. You've heard about my father, a funny old guy.

I loved him so much, but he could never tell us he loved any of us. Never did. I can never remember him hugging me or kissing me or anything. Never did that. He had his reasons to make us tough.

The other night, I watched on Amazon a film, I recommend it, called I Can Only Imagine. It's a true story. The singer, Have Mercy Me, who sings the song, I Can Only Imagine.

His father was an alcoholic who beat him, mistreated him. By the time I finished watching that film, I was just in floods of tears. If anybody could have heard me, it was just like horrendous.

[27 : 58] But it all tied together for me. The man in the film learns to forgive his father because Jesus is in his heart. When his father's dying of pancreatic cancer, he goes back and he wants to say, I want nothing more to do.

He even gets the car to go away. And then it finds out that his father's got cancer and he's dying. So he begins to nurse him and by nursing him, he begins to hear him. And by hearing him, he begins to respect him.

And by respecting him, he begins to love him. And then when he writes, I Can Only Imagine, and he sings it on Amy Grant's stage for the first time, he said that it was something to do with the man who he respected most in this life, his father.

He put a new song into my mouth. Even praise to our God. When I met Jesus, he put a song into my mouth. A song of praise to God.

And we're going to hear something that influenced the, I don't know, I guess I was probably 19. A band that I used to listen to called U2.

[29 : 05] And when you become a Christian in the Northeast, it wasn't cool in the 1980s. And a 19-year-old still needs to feel a bit cool.

So I discovered a band called U2. And they sang a song from Psalm 40. We're going to listen to about three and a half minutes of it just before we close.

This is from Chicago, 2005. I've been to see them and I've heard this song there. It's wonderful. What you wouldn't hear for the next two minutes is 60,000 people or so are singing the refrain, how long, how long, how long to sing this song?

Whenever I listen to that, I've listened to it live whenever I listen to it, when I listen to U2, I think of all of those, perhaps the vast majority of those people who have no idea what they're saying.

They're still in a miry pit. They're still in a well, clear. They're still in captivity to the bondage of their sin.

[30 : 13] And when they cry out, how long, how long, how long? If only they knew the God who could lift them out. Eugene Peterson and Bono have had a special place in this sermon.

They actually met together just before Eugene died. It's a brilliant video on YouTube when Bono goes to Eugene Peterson's house. What had happened was he'd been to the Bible Museum in the States and the guy who runs the museum, he'd said, you know, I can meet most people in the world.

And he even had Mikhail Gorbachev come to his house. He said, I could meet most people in the world, but the one person I'd love to meet in this world is Eugene Peterson. And he said, it's funny, I know him.

Eugene Peterson at the time was working on a Bible translation, so this guy rang him up and said, Bono would like to meet you. And of course, classically, he said, who's he? He said, Bono was like the, you know, one of the biggest rock stars in the world.

He said, I'm busy. Can't do it. At this point, the interviewer who interviewed him later said, but it was Bono. He said, yeah, but I had Isaiah. Anyway, they eventually met and they talked about the Psalms and Eugene's translation of the Psalms.

[31 : 42] Eugene Peterson admitted that he never really liked you two singing, but he said, Bono is singing to the very people I did this work for. I feel that we are allies in this.

He is helping me get the message out to the very people Jesus spent much of his time with. I'm not talking about Bono, of course, really, or Eugene Peterson.

I'm telling you about Jesus, who whether you're in a pit of despair, a pit of sin, a pit of regret, a pit of desperation, he can lift you out of that.

He can set your feet upon a rock. He can make your footsteps firm. If you will say, Lord Jesus, I am poor and needy. Think of me.

Then you will discover that he is your help and your deliverer. He will not delay. Let him put a song into your heart.